THE ART OF HANS HEYSEN

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tion of 1700 copies

THE ART OF HANS HEYSEN

1,700 copies of this edition
have been printed.

PLATE I.
20in. x 15⅓in.

The Toilers.
Painted in 1920.

THE ART OF HANS HEYSEN

SPECIAL NUMBER OF
ART IN AUSTRALIA

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COLOUR

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BLACK & WHITE

PREFACE

WHEN the paintings of Hans Heysen were first exhibited about twenty years ago there were a few keen watchers of the artistic sky of Australia who believed that a new star had swum into their ken. Their faith has long since been justified; Heysen's brilliance has increased, and he is now regarded not only as one who has already made a splendid contribution to Australian landscape, but also as a water-colourist likely to be ranked with the great.

Heysen is represented in most of the few national art galleries we have in Australia; but the greater part of his work is in private collections. He was fortunate in not having to wait long for recognition from picture-buyers in his adopted country, which is his artistic birthplace, and he was thrice awarded by the N.S.W. National Gallery the Wynne prize for the best landscape of the year.

Our ambition has been to make good Australian work as widely known as possible by means of three-colour reproductions, and plans were made of this book some time ago. It is, of course, no more than a temporary estimate of a still developing artist, but it represents his work to date as fully as possible. In the selection of pictures we have had the valuable assistance of the artist himself, and the hearty co-operation of the Director and Trustees of the National Gallery of N.S.W., Dr. S. A. Ewing and Messrs. A. S. McMichael, George A. Rowell and Robert Bryce, of Melbourne, Dr. George H. Abbott and Messrs. Will Ashton, J. R. McGregor, E. Gruner, E. W. Knox, Norman Lindsay, Gayfield Shaw, R. H. Dangar and P. H. Morton, Sydney, and Mrs. T. Barr-Smith, Adelaide, to all of whom we tender our thanks.

Probably no one is better acquainted with Heysen as an artist or more competent to write upon his work than Lionel Lindsay, to whom we entrusted the critical introduction to this book. Mr. Lindsay is a practising artist in water-colour and other media, who is also well acquainted with the masterpieces of the old world and with the theories of the principal art critics. When asked to write the introduction, he made a special visit to Ambleside in order to discuss with Heysen the latter's methods and aims. We have to thank him for his valuable article.

To the printers, Messrs. A. McQuitty & Co., and the process-engravers, Messrs. Hartland & Hyde, Sydney, and the Globe Engraving Co., of Melbourne, we are also indebted for the skill and care given to their respective parts of the work.

THE EDITORS.

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THE ART OF HANS HEYSEN

By LIONEL LINDSAY

> "Power to select is the supreme test of comprehension, and justifies the assurance with which we put the artist above the savant, the man who creates above the man who knows."—Sir Walter Armstrong.

HEYSEN — THE MAN

Art of any kind, be it original and honest, traditional or mere plagiary, is a mirror that reflects infallibly the soul of its maker. Once the fashion of the hour has passed, there is no escape from the inquiring eye of truth. Then is the masquerader unmasked, the hireling stripped of his temporary honours. Only the true artist, clad in his native sincerity, shall survive; and so we have come to look upon sincerity as the base upon which all true art is builded, and upon which all true men must build.

Sincerity implies character—a certain quality and direction of mind. Aubrey Beardsley and Charles Keene are minds utterly dissimilar, yet we never doubt their individual sincerity, for each remained true to a fixed ideal. It is the same with all the great artists; each sought his own truth, and so we range them—Rubens and Rembrandt, Rodin and Corot, Velasquez and Vermeer—in the great gallery of the faithful who fulfilled the high purpose of their destinies.

In the life and art of Hans Heysen I find a rare sincerity—the true reflection of the man and his work. In both, purpose and achievement seem so powerfully welded together that the years of struggle and adversity take on an air of inevitability, as if his destiny had been directed by some Homeric goddess of landscape.

The truth is, I suppose, that in Heysen instinct and character have been truly mated; that his mind, simple yet profound, has never wavered from its course. Love of nature, love of art; he possesses both equally and at once. Nature he loves as only a great landscape painter and poet can love her who is at once goddess and mistress. That love he expresses with such supreme technical skill that I believe it will place him eventually amongst the few undisputed masters of the art of water-colour.

. . . . . .

Hans Heysen was born in Hamburg in 1877. When he was six years old his father emigrated to Australia, and settled in Adelaide. There Hans went to school until he was fourteen, at which age he made his first excursion into water-colour—a drawing of a swan sailing on blue water to the accompaniment of green water reeds. As his palette consisted of Prussian-blue, chrome, and brown, the result is not difficult to imagine.

A year later he made his first water-colour from nature, with the knowledge acquired in reading a Winsor and Newton primer. It did not help him very far, and his first insight into colour and method came from the careful perusal of an article by Hume Nisbet, published in the "Boys' Own Paper." Nisbet advised the creation of a prism by stratifying three washes of blue, yellow and red, and upon this base, when dry, superimposing the drawing. This method, largely used by the early English Water-colourists, created a ground that was romantic to work upon, and helped the sense of unity, but like all recipes left its impress of monotony.

Heysen had been apprenticed to an ironmonger when he left school, and the only time he had for painting was on Sundays and holidays. He used to prepare his "swag" overnight so as to be up before dawn and away into the bush at the earliest moment, keen to miss no hour of painting light. Until he was twenty this was his invariable procedure, though he had left the ironmongery at the age of sixteen, and joined his father to help in carrying farm and dairy produce. Driving in the open country was pleasanter than work in town, and if he could not sit down and paint it, he was able to observe the landscape, and familiarise his eye with the changes of the sky, and the different light-effects of weather and the seasons.

His first sales were made through the agency of a friendly tobacconist, who hung up some of his sketches in the shaving saloon. Customers, attracted by the little pictures, bought them for sums varying from ten shillings to a pound; and one, a picture dealer, noting their popularity, approached the young artist and paid him £5 for thirteen. These he framed and sold so profitably that later he entered into a six months' agreement with Heysen by which the latter was to supply six water-colours a week or two oils, 24 x 18in., receiving in return a salary of £2 15s. per week.

One of Heysen's first appreciators was Mr. R. Barr-Smith, who to his purchase of four water-colours added the payment of a year's tuition at the School of Design, Adelaide, under H. P. Gill. As Heysen was working for a living during the day, he was able to draw only at night, but he learnt something from his teacher, who possessed a well-balanced mind and a wide interest in art. Gill's own work was rather matter-of-fact, but his technique was sound and direct, and he was an honest draughtsman.

Heysen worked hard for the dealer, who profited so well when he auctioned his collection that he must have felt financially wounded when four public-spirited gentlemen, struck by the remarkable promise of the work, put their heads together and sent Heysen to Europe to study. These patrons, whose example might well be followed in the interests of art and artists, were Mr. A. L. Davidson, Mr. J. A. Joyner, Mr. De Rose and Dr. H. H. Wigg. They furnished Heysen with £400 and left him full discretion to study where he wished. He was to send them all finished works and retain his studies.

Away he went in 1899 to Paris, following the grand convention of youth in art, and started to work at Julien's Academy under Jean Paul Laurens and Benjamin Constant. Later he shifted to the Beaux Arts to work under Bonnat, drawing at night at Colarossi's where Prenet, Colin and Tournes criticised in turn. In the classes he never painted but drew hard all the time, reserving for the summer vacations the pleasure of indulgence in colour.

For the first three winters he worked in Paris, spent his first summer in Holland, his second and third in Scotland. The whole of the fourth year he passed in Italy, drawing in the Art Schools at Florence, and travelling about, knapsack on back, foot-slogging like a true vagabond when the road called him—seeing Venice and Siena, Rome and Naples.

His drawings of Italian towns remind me of Turner's. They have the same clear and expressive line, the same accumulation of crowded buildings upon noble hills. I remember his Venetian water-colours exhibited in his first Melbourne show, and when I remarked to him on this resemblance—particularly in the soft white domes, he told me that he could not get Turner out of his head all the time he spent in Venice. He wilfully Turnerised the Eternal City, and made some beautiful compositions, but wisely never developed them, for, as all painters know who have attempted it, Rome and most

other cities of Italy are so beautiful that invention fails before their finality of form. The painter feels he is but copying a work of art and that before such finished perfection he is powerless to create.

I had the pleasure of looking over many of these drawings in his studio. All express form and character; only a few are tone drawings. Heysen, who had painted till he was twenty and did not discover his want of knowledge until he went abroad, had applied himself to drawing only. In tackling everything that interested him, from Dutch mills and old Paris to the olive gardens of Capri, from Scottish castles to Venetian fountains, he was training his eye and hand in the rare school of diversified interests. Scotland enchanted him. He became a haunter of its ruins and castellated keeps. Fifeshire drew him twice by the glamour of its landscape. In Scotland he felt he must paint; in Italy he only wanted to draw.

For the first six months after his arrival in Paris, Heysen tells me, he was taken by the brilliant work he saw. Then the Barbizon painters opened his eyes, and the clever cosmopolitan work which had first attracted him faded for ever; the typical international art-student had become a student of nature as well as of art; the emotional soul of landscape had been revealed to him. He was drawn to Mason for subject-matter and mood, and to Turner and David Cox for their mastery of water-colour, so that when he returned to Adelaide in 1903 he had plenty of compositions ready to work upon, chiefly in the vein of Mason and the Barbizon painters. Of these, "Coming Home," in the Sydney Gallery, shows Heysen as an accomplished picture-builder, a careful observer, but as yet uninspired by a personal point of view. Everything in the picture is placed with care and painted conscientiously, but it lacks rhythm; it does not grow of its own accord. The painter is inspired more by art than nature.

"Mystic Morn," in the Adelaide Gallery, was completed in 1904, in which year the artist married Miss Bartels. As sales were few and his art alone could not support him he set up a studio and taught for the following four years. In 1907 he went to New Zealand and returned with some splendid renderings of mountain scenery. With these and his Venetian sketches, Sydney pastels and small Australian landscapes, he braved the Melbourne public in the following year. The exhibition was a success, and he cleared £750 on his sales. It was the turning point in his career. He decided to give up teaching and settled in Hahndorf, attracted by the simple old-fashioned village,

and the magnificent belt of white and red gums in which it lies. He was now free to develop his personality in landscape, having at his back accumulated knowledge, and about him a beautiful countryside which contained all the elements of the landscape painter's art in a most typical Australian setting.

Not long after Heysen's first Melbourne exhibition, I had a letter from him, which reveals his attitude to Australian art and his sincere love of Australia. He has sometimes expressed to me his regret at "wasting" four good years in Europe that might have been more profitably spent in studying nature here, but I think he owes to those years of work abroad, and the masterpieces he saw, the high standard, in pursuit of which he has already gone far on his road. In this letter he says:—"I think there are signs of an art revival in Australia, or at least I should say that the continual stream of good exhibitions held in Melbourne is almost certain to produce some beginning of a revival in the production of good Australian pictures. If only Australia could hold some of the better men! But the trouble is the artists come with their pictures, have successful sales, and away they clear again—back to a more congenial artistic atmosphere, they claim. They say there is no living to be made here. No doubt Streeton had a jolly hard struggle, but things, I feel sure, have bettered themselves since then. When artists return, one and all proclaim the wonderful paintable material there is in Australia; its light and its vastness. If they see these great beauties, why don't they stop and paint what they profess to love? Is it that they are afraid of the isolation? Personally I believe isolation is a good thing for an artist; he has a chance of finding himself and is not always too anxious to paint for exhibitions. In fact, one does not realise the mannerism or artificiality of most of the so-called clever work until one has lived quietly and been compelled to depend upon oneself."

His early work showed traces of the influence of French impressionism in the attempt to render the effect of sunlight by opposing orange lights to blue and purple shadows, sometimes in the use of broken touches of colour for the sake of vibration. Then he passed to the romance of blue and gold, of which Sir Baldwin Spencer's "Sunset Haze" was one of the first successes, and another is "Summer," in the Sydney Gallery, in which his scheme is worked in a higher key. He refers to both these pictures in the following

letter, the first water-colour being his exhibit at the Federal Exhibition in Adelaide:—

"My own water-colour (30 x 22) is one I have not long finished for Professor Spencer. In it I believe I have got a truer impression of the Australian character—in form, light and colour—than in any of my previous work, barring perhaps one other I had finished just previous to this picture, of sheep travelling under gums in dusty heat and morning light. When Professor Spencer saw this, he wired me a message of congratulation, which, of course, made me very happy. I am glad to say this picture bore good fruit. On the strength of it and some black and white compositions of other ideas I got nine commissions, including two from the Governor, Sir Gibson Carmichael. These will keep me at work for some months as they are nearly all half-imperial size.

"At present I am working on one of these—'Threshing Peas' —under or between some large gums. In it I am trying to get all the light and heat I can, raising it some degrees higher in key than my Sydney Gallery water-colour; but to give expression to that intangible stuff, light and atmosphere, is indeed a problem. Yet I feel these to be the essence of Australian landscape; they are what make nature so various and fascinating. Sunshine, above all, is the essence of life, and then atmosphere. To give these, with an arrangement of beautiful and truthful forms, should make beautiful pictures. Ah, well, we can only have a try—but it is fine to dream about it."

Heysen did more than "dream about it." In 1910, working in a richer and deeper key, in warmer skies and weightier tone, he gave us that fine series in which romantic interest is wedded to classic dignity of form. Here he has entered into a finer comprehension of the forces governing colour and light, for he came to know what most painters are late in learning, that the sky, and not the direct rays of the sun, is the main factor influencing colour. With rare insight he has found that contrasts of colour destroy harmony, and that harmonious tone can only be preserved by the continuous consideration of the sky which not only influences colour but dominates harmony in art as in nature. His manner, too, has become larger; to strength he has added subtlety; he fills his composition with nobler shapes, separated by finer differences in spacing. He owes all this to his continuous preoccupation with his art and constant intimacy with nature.

PLATE XXXII.

Hans Heysen.
Photograph by Judith Fletcher.

The Barbizon painters were right. They knew that to live in a town and visit the country like a cockney excursionist was but to play with work. To know, to penetrate the secrets and mystery of nature, she must be taken to wife and lived with intimately, year in year out, fair weather and foul. Hahndorf has been to Heysen what the little village of Barbizon was to Rousseau and Millet. It made him the intimate of nature and of the life of the farmers.

Although it lies in the heart of a typically Australian landscape, Hahndorf (now called Ambleside) is a microcosm of agrarian Europe. The influences of climate and environment have naturally affected its inhabitants, yet it retains the forms and usages of its ancestry. The delightful farm-houses reveal their construction timbers, interlaid with dab or mellowed bricks; the cant and cleft angles of the roofs, the old out-of-door ovens, the barns and waggons with their heavy but graceful lines, were all built upon a long trusted tradition. The effect of all this upon Heysen has been, I think, to emphasise the message of the Earth. A sense of eternity broods ever about the continuity of farm and village life; and where modern improvements have not eradicated the old implements, whether the earth is tilled in Tuscany, the vegas of Murcia, or in Hahndorf among the Adelaide hills, we are never far from the Eclogues of Virgil.

Heysen spent four years in Hahndorf where two of his children were born. He worked in a picturesque old cowshed, which he had transformed into a studio. Here he has been visited by State Governors and other patrons, and in this humble atelier were produced some of his most romantic pictures. In 1912, finding his growing family cramped in the little Hahndorf cottage, he bought "The Cedars," a fine property about a mile from the village, and here he considers himself fixed for life.

"We have a charming old house now," he wrote to me after purchasing it, "about a mile out of Hahndorf, with forty acres of bush and cleared land. The studio is built away from the house on the slope of a hill overlooking a fine bit of distance—an ideal position; in fact, without doubt, we have an ideal home for my lifetime, for I feel happiest and most contented in the country, away from the town and so-called 'civilization.' I can still say that the country is appealing to me stronger than ever. I can say I am happy in isolation —(away from most art matters) in the midst of nature.

"We have bought this place, and have Melbourne to thank for the realisation of our wishes, for it is as much my wife's wish to live in the country as it is my own. It was my last exhibition, which realised over £1,500, besides other commissions, that enabled us to purchase 'The Cedars'."

Heysen's mode of life, as well as the cast of his mind, affiliates him with the painters of Barbizon. Like them he lives in a true painters' country of little rivers and hills, forest and farm lands. Within a radius of four miles of his home he possesses a landscape so various in character, that he will never exhaust its possibilities or charm. How he loves this country! I thought, as he drove me through it; he knows every tree by heart and speaks of old giants since fallen to the axe as one speaks of old friends. He is free of the farms to go and come as he pleases; while he talks as a man on the land with the farmer of the season's fortunes, of the rain and the crops, his artist's eye is conscious of the line and character of the ricks, the beauty of their colour and tone.

In his last letter to me he says: "I have not been able to concentrate sufficiently to write, in fact; I still seem incapable of it. My mind has been completely out in the country, and the last two weeks have seen me out with sketch book practically all day and every day. It is one of those spells when the impulse won't let one rest or think of anything else. . . . . We have had a remarkable autumn—beautiful and without rain. You would have loved it all—those golden tones along the river and the lovely atmosphere prevailing over all! At this time of the year the sun is low and casts deeper and longer shadows, giving a greater feeling of bulk and weight to all in nature. The red gums are particularly fine and since you were here I have made many more studies of them. But, good night—it is already late, and it smells like frost outside, which means another beautiful morning."

I like to think of him thus; always looking to the morning of another day's work, this fine serious artist, and most amiable of men, who paints Australia with such fidelity and depth of passion that I for one accept him for her most able representative.

HEYSEN'S ART

The history of all plastic art is concerned with the education of the eye. Archaic forms are the evidence of immature minds, for

the hand and eye keep pace with the march of intelligence—the ascent to the Parthenon is long and gradual.

To trace this evolution of forms is one of the most fascinating tasks of the historian of art. In essence it is the history of the mind of man from the caveman's drawings in the Dordogne to a danseuse by Degas. Animals and the human form, the nearest things to man's daily existence, were conquered long before the shapes and growths of the earth, and it was only when Western mankind broke with the old hieratic traditions that it turned on nature a glance of inquiry and interest. The naivete of the primitive painters is the sign manual of ignorance. For Giotto a couple of trees, more like a child's nosegay than anything in nature, constitute a forest; he can no more. The next comer adds a few flowers, and we arrive at the articulated tree with each leaf meticulously shaped. The eye sees so badly still that the drawing is that of a child. Gradually interest wakens with discovery, the intelligence comprehends new forms, and the patient hand follows its director. Carpaccio's intense interest in every manifestation of life quickens the age of Titian. So we move from Velasquez to the Dutchmen, and from the Dutch to Barbizon. Modern landscape is a thing of yesterday, and was born in Holland.

Rembrandt, unable to bear the prison air of the house after the death of his wife, found in the open air solace and tranquillity. His great landscape etchings date from this period. No longer is he content with an Italian paraphrase of nature, but, absorbed in realities, he penetrates the mystery of their character. "The Gold Weigher's Field," "The Omval" and "The Cottage with the Great Tree"—these will never grow old. Their freshness is the bloom of nature's eternal youth.

It was because Rembrandt was absorbed by his subject-matter that the tree in the Omval etching is so beautiful and so eternally interesting. It was because Claude was fascinated by westering suns, Turner by the variability of the heavens and Corot by the mystery of foliage against the sky that they reached the sources of Truth and Beauty. And it is for the same reason that Heysen, haunting the gum like a dryad, has made of his divinity a real presence, and given to Australian landscape art its form and essence.

The great gum, the primeval tree, has more variety of shape than any other. Twist or turn, it contrives an elegance in rhythm and balance that lends it infinite variety. From the slender sapling to the

500-year old giant—and no two gums are alike—its character and colour possess variances denied all other trees. It eluded all the early painters, who consequently cursed it for its non-conformity to European traditions. How were they to generalise, to suggest its difficult foliage, its quiet enigmatic colour?

Definite forms like the "black boy" and the banksia, strange of shape but easy to define, they seized eagerly as characteristics of the new land. With the gum tree they never got further than the trunk, and all vision of its shape failed them when it came to the ramification of branches, the mass and character of foliage. Buvelot was the first of the earlier men to realise Australian character in landscape, and to draw a recognisable gum tree. The material he conquered shows that he possessed a clear unconventional mind; a passion to realise the truth of what he saw. He was undoubtedly a pathfinder in the wilderness of Australian landscape art, a beacon to Roberts, McCubbin and Streeton. With these three Australian art became idiosyncratic, and the last Old World echo died, silenced by the first clear note of nationalism. Streeton in landscape; Roberts and McCubbin in the landscape setting of life subjects; all attacked the problems of light and atmosphere, till then nearly unconsidered; so that Heysen had part of the way cleared for him, when he came to a close consideration of Australian landscape problems. Not that he was directly influenced by any of these painters; but, as no one escapes the influences of the age he lives in, his development must have been hastened by the direction they had given to landscape and the artistic atmosphere they had created.

The great gum still remained the crux. It had been treated as a landscape accessory by both Roberts and Streeton, its colour determined in the mass and middle distance, but its absolute character, what I might call its portraiture, had never been attempted. It was Heysen's destiny to solve this problem, and to it he brought the whole power of his will and the passion of his heart. How much courage, how much unremitting labour and love are here implied! What you see done with such apparent ease in his water-colours is the result of profound and long considered thought and years of untiring observation.

Strange as it may seem, few landscape painters have been masters of trees. Claude summarised them, Turner found them "difficult," Corot alone mastered them. If you examine many landscapes you

will find that painters have been more at home with the configuration of the earth, the accidents of surface, than with the great limbs and masses of tree forms lifted against the sky. The penetration of the leaves by the light, the inclination and suggestion of shifting shadows, the sky-light reflected on the leaf surfaces that mirror it vaguely—all these are difficulties presented to the painter apart from the structure of bole and branchage. But when you consider that in many trees—and particularly is this the case with the gum—you have spaces of light against which the far side of the foliage shows grey upon the sky, the problem of handling becomes complicated.

Many Australian painters, daunted by this sum of difficulties, content themselves with the trees in silhouette and the cast shadows. Others simplify them to flat masses, or relegate them to a comfortable middle distance. Heysen alone has resolved each difficulty in representation. With unshaken resolution, upheld by his passion for the beauty of the tree, he has studied its true modelling, the reflections that play along the various angles of the limbs—warm from the earth and cool from the sky—the slide and shift of shadow, and every modification in appearance that may be effected by the agency of light, until he knows the gum by heart, and is able to recreate its noble form with that natural ease which comes alone from profound knowledge.

"In all Australia there is nothing so Australian as a gum tree: nothing quite so Australian and nothing quite so fine," said Blamire Young. Because I believe this fine affirmation I consider Heysen's mastery of the tree as the greatest contribution to Australian landscape art. What Streeton won for Australian atmosphere and colour, Heysen has won for her essential forms, and through his art we own a larger familiarity with our native land. It is his peculiar glory to have created the image of the gum. He has done for its form and character what Theodore Rousseau did for the European oak and, whatever else he may paint, this will distinguish his work for all time.

Heysen's farming subjects will draw from the careless a comparison with Jean Francois Millet. Their subject matter, however, is not Millet's—it is the property of all painters of farm life. In weight and solidity of drawing, there is perhaps a sympathy, but where Millet's mind was Biblical, Heysen's is pantheistic, and it is the tone of the mind that differentiates.

Millet, that great and melancholy poet of labour, was haunted by the shade of Michael Angelo. He overstressed character and

movement, so that they stay fixed for ever by a gesture unforgettable. His own sad heart he planted in the breasts of his peasants. They toil, but take no joy of their labour. Their harvesting represents their daily bread, but with it no grace of festival.

Charles Jacque, Millet's precursor as a draughtsman of peasants, did not charge the peasant's lot with his own idiosyncrasy. More disinterested, less of a poet, he painted and etched every phase of farming life with a sureness of touch that betokens the exactitude of his observation. It is the daily life of the average French farm that he depicts: farm girls drawing water and feeding the pigs and the poultry; shepherds tending their sheep in fold and pasture; the sowing, the reaping, and the gathering into barns. Though Jacque's work has not the universally primitive character of Millet's, it is informed by a fine sanity. He loved what he painted for its own sake and for its particular truth—the truth not of the Psalms, but of the Virgilian Eclogues.

It is with Charles Jacque that I affiliate Heysen. Like him he preaches no moralities of the humble. Equally he loves the good earth—the ploughing, the sowing and the reaping, the animals that work for man, the recurrent characteristics of each season.

Copying nature will not go very far here, no matter how literal the transcription. The artist must know his material by heart before he can quicken it, and Heysen, by close observation, by the making of innumerable studies, has long prepared the way that leads to the expression of lyrical beauty. Emotion without knowledge is the mother of all sentimentality. Knowledge without emotion is cold and sterile. But Heysen possesses both. By the logic of observation he has pondered and valued his material. By the sensitiveness of his mind he has received and rendered his impressions. "Autumn Afternoon" and "The Spell," exhibited at the Society of Artists in 1918, created a profound impression. It was plain that Heysen's art had taken a fresh direction: that he was developing a new genre. The truth, the justness of observation, and the atmospheric beauty of these water-colours enchanted me, and in answer to my letter of congratulation, Heysen replied as follows:—

"It is good to have your appreciation of my panel of water-colours. The ploughing pictures you refer to were in a sense a new departure in introducing the human element, although the main theme still remains, 'light.' The old chap with 'Polly and Jack' munching

their well-earned late breakfast, happened on our own little plot last autumn. I came upon them at the moment when the animals were still sweating and steaming from their graft, and I had to work hard to get my impression of the form and general construction before the truth of the moment vanished, to be replaced by another truth. The word truth in art opens out a vast limitless space for argument. 'What is truth?' We must leave its answer to the individual temperament, for after all the main thing is to be honest to oneself and paint what one sees.

"Yes, Chinese and Japanese art is indeed fascinating, and it seems surprising to us how very modern their philosophy was over a thousand years ago. After all there is nothing new—Dame Nature doesn't change, she is what makes our own world so very beautiful, and all true modern art must spring from her, just as did the art of a thousand years ago. If we would only remember this, artists as a body would waste less time, yet it is most surprising when looking over my own work, to see how often I have been side-tracked unconsciously—possibly thinking to find an easier path—by following so-called temperament; and I am afraid this is the experience of most of us.

"The more one lives with nature and her inner truths come gradually home to one, the more unsurmountable seem the difficulties of realising its illusion on paper or canvas. But work seems the only remedy. At least so it appears to me."

I have never seen a picture by Heysen that betrayed the vanity of the virtuoso. His technical skill is amazing, yet is but the ready servant of his mind, the liberator of his emotion. Art for art's sake is too often but art for the sake of the artist's vanity, a swagger suit of clothes, a delight in legerdemain. The true artist is ever humble and reverent before his subject matter, before the image in his mind. To render it beautifully, he has learnt to master his medium, so that his brushes grow to his hand, incapable of rebellion.

Heysen has long passed the stage of conscious effort, and his work grows easily under his hand, once he has the motive of a picture clear in his mind's eye, and has laid the foundation of a good study. To some ideas of mine on this subject of handling, his answering letter contained the following:—

"You are quite right—I also think it absolutely essential to have a definite plan of attack before beginning each water-colour—the

PLATE XXXIII.

Heysen's Old Studio at Ambleside.
From the etching by Lionel Lindsay.

medium requires order and precision perhaps more than oil painting. At least my own habit is always to have a clear vision of the manner of approach and little is left to chance or so-called 'inspiration,' which is after all purely the outcome of technical knowledge. To muddle around in the hope of getting something in water-colour must lead to chaos and mud. And yet how often do we see this indecision and its consequences! But, after all, apart from technique the important thing is to have something to say."

Heysen's technique in water-colour is so direct that he may be said to have scarcely a method. He has no tricks, no catchpenny fancies. Plenty of water, fresh colour for every brushful, a fine paper on which he can develop his drawing—such is his method; and the bloom of the colour kept on the surface of the paper is his technical goal.

Heysen has used nearly every medium. He paints well in oil and handles pastel with distinction. He has made a few etchings—one a little gem a few inches square named the "Plough"—and his monotypes are about the best I have seen in that generally disappointing method. He is also an admirable painter of flowers. I think he might have painted them if he had never seen Fantin Latour's work, but I am sure that Fantin made him a master. The French artist has never been beaten in his own rare branch of art. With the utmost simplicity and with the most admirable method he sets in front of you a bunch of flowers that have the beauty of nature and the charm of art. He does not over-arrange them. His lucid spirit is content to perceive their native beauty and character, and his admirable eye to define colour value and form. Fantin's "Zinnias," in the Adelaide Gallery—the second best picture in Australia after the Melbourne Corot—is a masterpiece of masterpieces, a delight and a lesson in the art of flower painting that will stay as long as colour and canvas hold together.

Heysen has frankly accepted Fantin's attitude to his subject matter, and discarded all conscious arrangement and artifice. One of his little daughters, so he told me, has the gift of selection. She picks and discards what will not make a natural and harmonious bunch, and it is such a bunch that he sets himself to realise in all its freshness and beauty. He has painted three flower pieces this year, birthday gifts for his children, and told me he intended handing them each one in turn.

It is a singular fact that though still-life and flowers are painted by the acre, there is only one Chardin, one Fantin. In English water-colour, James alone has succeeded in capturing the soul of the flower, but I agree with Heysen that the medium is not capable of rendering the building power of light which demands the fuller medium of oil paint. It is in his grip of character, in his faithful observation of tone variation, the subtle character of the shadows, and the gleam and radiance of colour that Heysen succeeds after so many have failed. He is one of the few painters who have really won to the mastery of flower painting.

I do not think I can overpraise Heysen's use of charcoal as a medium, and though I step on the dangerous ground of comparison I will venture the opinion that it will be hard to find rivals to the three masterly drawings reproduced in this book. Here he challenges Millet on undisputed ground.

The execution is never summary or hurried, as we so often see in the rough drawings of painters made in the throes of composition. Nor does it show the cold care of the student. Heysen respects his paper, he does not muddy his undertones, he thinks of the surface tones in light, the mystery in shadow. It is plain that he enjoys not only the making of his drawing for the sake of its content, but has the craftsman's delight in his medium.

No reproduction, however good, can give the dry crumbled tone, the variation of light and suggested form in the laying of these surfaces and values. The powdered charcoal lying like pollen on the surface of the paper has its own magic, its own textural life. Examining these drawings, as I did on several occasions in Heysen's studio, there grew in my mind the sense of their finality—that, whatever after-purpose of paint their maker might put them to, on their own merits they might challenge his water-colour, and stand by themselves a fit expression of his mind and art. Here he follows a rhythm to its ultimate, builds by the fall of the light, and satisfies his masculine desire for the cubic weight of form. He suggests atmosphere always, and with it movement, the fugitive sense of light and shadows. The drawing lives; it is never, like so much modern drawing, a series of frozen contours.

For weeks Heysen will leave his brushes untouched, fascinated by some aspect of nature determined by the character of the season.

It may be the mass and architecture of the great gums, the line and character of hayricks, old cottages by moonlight, plough horses, or a levee of proud turkeys. But whatever the subject-matter, Heysen studies it until he possesses it wholly. Then comes the imperious hour of colour. The logic of his method is at the service of his emotional experience; and with a certitude that rarely falters, the painter achieves his work with that ease and technical beauty, which is the natural offspring of his labour and meditation.

. . . . . .

Transcendentalism—the desire to separate mind from sense, to subordinate the beauty of this world to a vision of a hypothetical world, has never yet found votary in a great painter. "To realise the world is the task of intellect," says March Phillips. It is peculiarly the task of the artist. Nature is something more than Delacroix's dictionary. She is the repository of all beauty. So whether his objective be noble in itself, or dignified by the character of the artist's mind, only great love and great humility may reach the secret of beauty's source. And the artists who have loved nature with that untiring passion human love can rarely equal—what has been their estimation of her beauty? Corot called her "La Belle" and went each morning to salute her. Constable, speaking of his beloved Bergholt, said: "These scenes made me a painter." Rousseau, the great French artist, wrote: "The whispering trees, the growing heather, these are for me unchanging history. If I speak their language I shall have spoken the language of all time," and Turner, dying, summed up in a great phrase his understanding of nature's essence: "The sun is God."

To the company of the great lovers may also be added Hans Heysen, great also in comprehension. He has reached to-day that stage where picture-making formula is forgot, and nature alone is teacher. By the long road of effort he has come to unconscious observation, to the most subtle appreciation of rhythm in nature. That rhythm, revealed to him by sense, his logical mind follows to its source. He digs, he develops, he rebuilds nature's forms into the edifice of art; and when an artist has won to freedom from the insistency of tradition, and depends with the assurance of faith upon nature alone, he has come into the comprehension of the great harmony, part himself of nature and speaking with her voice.

PLATE XXXIV.
12in. x 13in.

The Rick Yard.
Charcoal Drawing—1919.

PLATE XXXV.
10in. x 8½in.

Water Gums.
Charcoal Drawing—1919.

PLATE XXXVI.
12½in. x 10in.

Gum Trees in Mist.
Charcoal Drawing—1918.

PLATE XXXVII.
10in. x 8in.

The Drinking Pool.
Charcoal Study—1919.

PLATE XXXVIII.
10¼in. x 8in.

The Hillside.
Charcoal Drawing—1919.

PLATE XXXIX.
Actual Size.

Goat's Head.
Etching.

PLATE XL.
Actual Size.

The Plough.
Etching

PLATE XLI.
16in. x 12¼in.

Turkeys.
Charcoal Study—1918.

PLATE XLII.
24in. x 18½in.

Country Road.
Charcoal Study—1920.

PLATE XLIII.

The Two Trees.
Etching.

PLATE XLIV.
10½in. x 8in.

A Basket Willow.
Charcoal Drawing—1920.

PLATE XLV.
24in. x 18½in.

Resting.
Charcoal Study—1919.

PLATE XLVI.
24½ in. x 19in.

Woodside Pastures.
Charcoal Study—1920.

PLATE XLVII.
5¾in. x 8in.

The Forge.
Etching—1918.

PLATE XLVIII.
15in. x 10½in.

Study.
Charcoal Drawing—1919.

PLATE XLIX.
24½in. x 18½in.

The Road.
Charcoal Study.

PLATE L.
10in. x 8in.

A Study.
Crayon Drawing—1917.

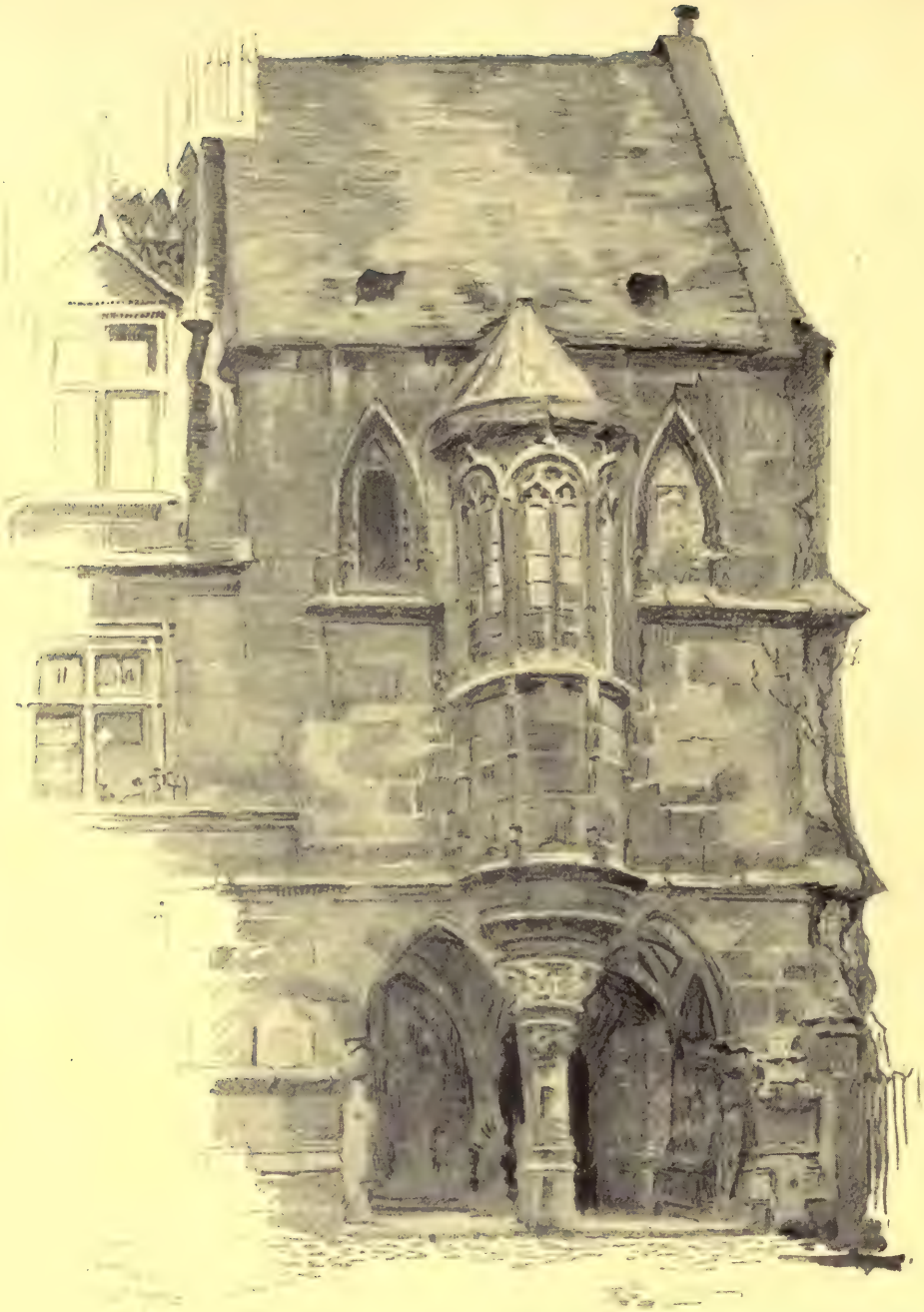

PLATE LI.
13in. x 10in.

Portion of the "Clounet," Paris.
Pencil Drawing—1900.

PLATE LII.
24in. x 18½in.

Turning the Plough.
Charcoal Drawing—1920.

PLATE LIII.
24½in. x 18½in.

Changing Pastures.
Charcoal Study—1919.

PLATE LIV.
9in. x 7in.

The Home Paddock.
Charcoal Study—1918.

PLATE LV.
10in. x 8in.

A Study.
Charcoal—1919.

PLATE LVI.
8in. x 6½ins.

Farmyard Study.
Charcoal—1918.

PLATE LVII.
24in. x 18½in.

Into the Light, Early Morning.
Charcoal Drawing—1920.

PLATE LVIII.
16in. x 12in.

A Study.
Charcoal Drawing—1918.

PLATE LIX.
10in. x 8in.

The Brick Kiln.
Charcoal Drawing—1919.

PLATE LX.
24½in. x 18½in.

Clearing the Harrow.
Charcoal Drawing—1919.

PLATE LXI.
15½in. x 12½in.

White Gums.
Study in Red Chalk—1915.

PLATE LXII,
16in. x 12in.

Study of Labourer.
Crayon Drawing – 1910

PLATE LXIII.
15in. x 11¼in.

Tree Study, Narrabeen.
Charcoal Drawing—1908.

PLATE LXIV.
24in. x 18½in.

Harrowing.
Charcoal Drawing.

PLATE LXV.
7¾ in. x 6¾ in.

A Study.
Charcoal Drawing—1919.